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## Primary source use in high school history classrooms: Categories, frequency, and assessment

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PRIMARY SOURCE USE IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CLASSROOMS:  
CATEGORIES, FREQUENCY, AND ASSESSMENT

A Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

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University of Northern Iowa  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Historians use primary sources to create a narrative of the past. However, in high-school classrooms, students are often relegated to using textbooks, documentaries, and other secondary sources as a principal means of information. While these sources do have merit, primary sources make up the basis for historical interpretation. By studying these items, students can see the past come alive before them and better understand the dynamic nature of history while developing analytical and critical thinking skills, which are crucial to developing “historical thinking” skills.

Throughout this thesis project, I will research the many various forms of primary sources as well as a variety of assessment styles. By reviewing literature and analyzing results from a survey of high school history teachers, I will discover the manner and scope in which primary sources are used in history classes. Also, I hope to determine which primary sources students respond best to, taking into account their age and gender. Teachers will be able to use this information to construct more engaging and challenging lesson plans featuring primary sources. Knowing which types of primary sources are most effective for students at various levels will allow teachers and students to better utilize primary sources they do use, therefore conserving valuable class time and student attention.

### **Research Questions**

One question this thesis will address is what types of primary sources do teachers use, and which do they prefer the most? Also, I will research which types of primary sources students respond best to, broken down by gender and age. I also hope to discover how often primary sources are used in history classrooms, what strategies are used to teach with them,

and how teachers assess the effectiveness of these sources. Once these primary questions are answered, I will suggest ways in which primary sources can most effectively be used, based on the information I gather.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Constructing a History Curriculum**

To construct a curriculum for history, it is first necessary to determine what important concepts must be understood by the student to successfully achieve a knowledgeable construct of the past. One goal of history education is to educate students in civics so that they are engaged citizens and cultivated people. According to the National Council for History Education, history education should “explore vital unifying themes and narratives of human experience,” such as technology and human interaction with the environment.<sup>1</sup>

Another goal of history education is to create historically-minded students who are able to understand the past in relation to their place in the world, while also understanding past events from the point of view of those who lived through these events. This would also equip students with the critical and creative thinking tools necessary to understand the overall narrative of the past and interpret the present.<sup>2</sup> The following quote from the National Center for History in the Schools describes the primary goals of history education:

True historical understanding requires students to engage in historical thinking: to raise questions and to marshal solid evidence in support of their answers; to go beyond the facts presented in their textbooks and examine the historical record for themselves; to consult documents, journals, diaries, artifacts, historic sites, works of art, quantitative data, and other evidence from the past, and to do so imaginatively--taking into account the historical context in

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<sup>1</sup>National Council for History Education, *Building a United States History Curriculum: A Guide to Using Themes and Selecting Content*, The Building A History Curriculum Series, vol. 3 (Westlake: National Council for History Education, 2000), 4-6.

<sup>2</sup>National Council for History Education, *Building a United States History Curriculum*, 7.

which these records were created and comparing the multiple points of view of those on the scene at the time.<sup>3</sup>

This quote illustrates the importance of primary sources in satisfying the standards for history education. To become historically-minded people, students must examine, evaluate, criticize, and synthesize primary sources to fully understand the past. This process through the use of primary sources is further outlined in the following sections.

### **Benefits of Primary Sources**

Primary sources are beneficial in history classrooms for obvious reasons. They provide a first-hand account of an event or time period, and they can be synthesized to piece together a more complete picture of the past from multiple perspectives. They are not someone's interpretations of information, but rather raw material for historians to work with. As budding historians, history students should certainly interact with various primary sources.

According to Paras, Piche, and Nillas, *"The benefits of using primary sources can be grouped into two major themes: developing a critical and comprehensive understanding of history and creating a relevant and meaningful learning experience for students...In addition to finding these results, we discovered that using primary sources helps build historical empathy in students."*<sup>4</sup> Essentially, primary sources make history come alive for students by engaging them intellectually and emotionally.

Primary sources also allow students to connect with history and retain the information they learn. As cited by Skinner, students remember, "10 percent of what they read; 20 percent

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<sup>3</sup>National Center for History in the Schools, "Overview of Standards in Historical Thinking," UCLA (2005), <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/thinking5-12.html>, (accessed October 18, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Emily Paras, Briana Piche, and Leah Nillas, "The Use of Primary Sources in High School History Classrooms," *Teaching with Primary Sources Journal*, no. 2 (February 2010), <http://tps.nl.edu/TPSJJournalIWU22.htm> (accessed 12 June 2010).

of what they hear; 30 percent of what they see; 50 percent of what they see and hear; 70 percent of what they say; and 90 percent of what they do and say.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, if students are merely reading a textbook chapter about a topic, they are likely to remember 10 percent of what they read. However, if they have to actively analyze and critique a photograph, they are “doing” history, and if they were to talk about their findings in a group, they would likely remember 90 percent of the information they learned. This difference in retention is significant, and illustrates the value of primary sources in high school history classrooms. It is not probable to achieve 90 percent retention with every activity, but using various primary sources allows students to hear, see, say, and do in addition to reading. This ensures that their retention will at least be greater than the 10 percent they would retain from reading a textbook.

In their research, Paras, Piche and Nillas also found that students gain more than historical understanding by studying primary sources. The process of historical study, which involves critical thinking, critiquing, analyzing, and synthesizing, helps students develop these essential interdisciplinary skills. Of course, primary sources can be misused. If not properly guided or given adequate background information, students may misinterpret sources, and therefore will not gain a better understanding of history. Also, if irrelevant or inappropriate primary sources are used, they will be ineffectual.<sup>6</sup> However, with careful selection of sources and proper lesson planning, primary sources can easily be incorporated into most lessons.

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<sup>5</sup>Michelle Skinner, “Listening,” Business Encyclopedia, University of St. Francis, <http://www.stfrancis.edu/content/ba/ghkickul/stuwebs/btopics/works/listening.htm> (accessed 12 June 2010).

<sup>6</sup>Paras, Piche, and Nillas, “The Use of Primary Sources in High School History Classrooms.”

## Choosing Primary Sources

Primary sources should enhance students' learning about any topic or concept with which they are used. They may complement what the student has already learned, or they may expand and challenge students' knowledge. *Building a United States History Curriculum* argues that, "First, whatever detail is chosen should directly serve the purposes of historical study outlined above – and more effectively than other choices would have."<sup>7</sup> This quote describes not only what content should be taught in a history class, but also is useful to determine what primary sources to choose. Whichever primary sources a teacher chooses to use in his or her classroom, they should serve the purposes of history education outlined in the previous section. Primary sources should illuminate the content of a lesson, which in turn will improve students' understanding of concepts, thereby achieving national and state historical standards. The developmental and educational levels of the students must also be taken into consideration when choosing primary sources. By differentiating instruction, teachers can use sources of varying difficulty in the same lesson so that students of all ability levels are challenged. One example of differentiation may be scaffolding students in group projects, allowing them to teach and learn from each other. Some consideration when choosing primary sources may be given to the preferences of the students. Some groups of students prefer certain types of sources over others, but individual students' preferences will vary widely. For example, author Joan Musbach's experience with eight graders demonstrated that her students had an inclination to read about historical characters of their same age.<sup>8</sup> This is likely true for

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<sup>7</sup>National Council for History Education, *Building a United States History Curriculum*, 9.

<sup>8</sup>Joan W. Musbach, "Using Primary Sources in the Secondary Classroom," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 15 no. 4 (2001): 30-31.

all students, which is why teachers often use the story of Anne Frank to illuminate the Holocaust, or the image of Emmett Till to engage students in discussion regarding the Civil Rights Movement.

Choosing different types of primary sources is also important. Popular primary sources include music and images from a time period, but teachers should not limit their students to these obvious, though still valuable, sources. Cartoon strips, magazine articles, advertisements, diary entries, letters to friends and family, sales receipts, birth and death records, town landscapes, and building styles – these are all primary sources that can be utilized by teachers to help their students understand a historical person, period, or event.<sup>9</sup>

### **Using Primary Sources**

The ways in which primary sources are used can influence their effectiveness. When using primary sources, it is important that teachers provide enough background information for students to understand the source in both the correct chronological and analytical contexts, while leaving enough unsaid for the student to interpret. Finding this balance between what information to provide and what to withhold is one of the difficulties of working with primary sources. Without this background information, the primary source is not as valuable to the student. In introductory history classes taught in high schools, students do not likely have the skills to contextually place sources on their own.<sup>10</sup> Teachers must also ensure that students understand the perspective of the sources they study. Some sources can still be primary sources, but are written well after an event. If the event went well, for example, a person

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<sup>9</sup>Drake, Frederick D., and Lynn R. Nelson, *Engagement in Teaching History: Theory and Practices for Middle and Secondary Teachers* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2005), 141.

<sup>10</sup>Musbach, "Using Primary Sources in the Secondary Classroom," 31-32.



writing a letter could exaggerate their role in the event. Students will further develop their critical, historical minds by questioning the origins and motives of the source, therefore engaging in the work of historians.

Primary sources can add depth and sophistication to lackluster lessons. They also provide a way for history teachers to incorporate other subject areas into lessons, like art or literature. Primary sources also complement most methods of instruction. They can supplement lectures, or they can be examined by small groups of students who can then teach their classmates the importance and relevance of the primary source. Other hands-on learning activities that actively engage students include discussions and debates inspired by primary sources, or interpreting the meaning of a song's lyrics at the beginning of class. A student presenting what he or she has learned from these hands-on activities results in the most retention. These activities may make learning more exciting and fun for students, but still result in meaningful learning.<sup>11</sup>

Primary sources are often used in one of two ways. They can either be used singularly to supplement what the teacher tells the students, or in conjunction with one another, allowing the students to discover for themselves what the primary sources are saying. However, a third method of teaching with primary sources, presented by Frederick Drake and Lynn Nelson, builds upon the second approach outlined above. This method uses primary sources in conjunction with each other, but also encourages students to become more engaged in the topic by finding a related primary source of their own. Drake also describes three orders of primary sources, the first order being those primary sources a teacher cannot teach without.

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<sup>11</sup>Musbach, "Using Primary Sources in the Secondary Classroom," 31.

For example, the Declaration of Independence would be a first order primary source for most history teachers teaching the American Revolution. A second order primary source for the same topic may be a letter written by Thomas Jefferson. Second order sources are supplemental to first order primary sources. Third order primary sources are less important than first and second order sources, but still valuable to illuminating a concept.<sup>12</sup>

Since students have different interests and may respond differently to various primary sources, it can be difficult to assess the effectiveness of primary sources. One way to do so would be through standard multiple choice examinations, but this is doubtfully the best assessment for student learning in history. To discover what information students did learn from primary sources, a teacher could conduct an oral exam asking the student about the concepts the primary source illustrated. Or, a teacher could assign an essay relating to the primary source. Any sort of performance examination would be better suited to communicate the effectiveness of primary sources through student learning.<sup>13</sup> Assessments of student learning, therefore, are assessments of primary sources.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To accomplish the goals of this thesis, I developed a survey to be taken by local high school social studies teachers regarding their teaching methods and primary sources. This survey differed from my anticipated survey method in two ways. I originally planned on surveying five to ten teachers, but the actual survey used was developed for twenty to thirty teachers. Second, in order for the survey to be more valuable and effective, the questions I

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<sup>12</sup>Drake, Frederick D., and Lynn R. Nelson, *Engagement in Teaching History*, 144-145.

<sup>13</sup>Drake and Nelson, *Engagement in Teaching History*, 115-117.

developed necessitated teachers to share sensitive information, which required me to receive permission from the Institutional Review Board to continue my research.

The survey contained questions pertaining to teachers' use of various primary sources, and their perceived student reactions to these sources. Also, some questions asked for teachers' input on some of the problems associated with using primary sources, such as nudity, violence, or offensive language. These questions were chosen because they most directly address teachers' use of primary sources, and their opinions about using primary sources. Many of the questions asked teachers to numerically rate different types of primary sources based on their effectiveness, both in general and for certain groups of students. These types of questions were set up as a table listing the various types of primary sources, with a box next to each source for the participant to write their rating of that source. The survey was formatted to make answering the questions as easy as possible to accommodate teachers' busy schedules and ensure maximum participation, as illustrated by the table format for many questions. However, in order to get the quality of information desired, some questions were left open-ended, and not in a table format.

The survey received approval from the Institutional Review Board. The IRB ensures the practice of ethical research, and since the survey required personal information from human participants, approval was necessary before delivering the survey. To view the IRB-approved survey, please see appendix I.

In order to have school secretaries distribute paper surveys, I was required by the IRB to have principals' permission to send their teachers the survey. I collected the email addresses of seventeen Cedar Valley high school principals and requested their permission. I was granted

permission by seven schools. I re-sent the email asking for permission twice, and still received no reply from the other principals. With this limitation, I was able to mail out 31 surveys by the end of March. I received six of these surveys back by May 8, 2010, a significantly lower number than I desired to extract valid data.

To enhance the results of the survey, I was able to incorporate some observations and reflections from the field experience associated with my history teaching methods class as a qualitative expansion of the survey. While I did not anticipate using this experience as a case study, it lent itself well to the purpose and goals of this thesis. This experience took place in a ninth grade classroom with an experienced teacher who shall be referred to as Mr. R to ensure anonymity. His use of primary sources and his methods of assessment will be further discussed in the results section of this paper.

After completing all of the research described above, I incorporated my findings with the information I collected from reviewing educational literature. From this combination, I interpreted the information, made observations, and outlined many avenues for further research to expand on the ideas presented here. Also, I developed several activities and lessons that utilize different types of primary sources, all of which will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections of this thesis. These activities were developed to best help students understand the sources themselves and why they are significant. Furthermore, these activities provide some suggestions for student assessment based on the information provided by the sources.

## RESULTS

### Survey

The results of the primary research method, the survey, were minimal and inconclusive because of the few number of surveys returned. Of the six teachers who responded, four of them use primary sources at least once a week. The other two use primary sources at least once a month. Of the primary sources listed on the survey, those used most frequently were photographs, documents, cartoons, and maps. Those used more rarely were autobiographies, diaries, letters, speeches, literature, artifacts, and oral histories. However, each teacher's use of different primary sources varied widely. Some teachers are fond of certain sources, while some are fond of other types of primary sources. In regard to the importance of various types of primary sources, photographs, film, maps, artifacts, and cartoons were deemed most valuable by at least five of the six teachers.

In regard to student interest in primary sources, many of the teachers expressed that their students enjoy studying films, artifacts, photographs, and cartoons, and these interests did not vary widely with age or gender. One teacher, however, made sure to point out that it is difficult to generalize student interest because each student has individual interests that do not necessarily relate to their age or gender.

Problems associated with using primary sources seemed to be limited. Time constraints were the most cited reason for not utilizing more primary sources in the classroom. Teachers have little time to plan their lessons on top of teaching, grading, and fulfilling other educational duties. It can be difficult to find helpful, appropriate sources with such little spare time. Also, once a teacher finds a source, he or she must take the time to find background information

about that source. They may also have to use valuable class time to teach students how to interpret different kinds of sources. For example, a political cartoon is understood differently than a photograph or document. Many teachers would rather use their class time to study more subjects, since history is generally taught in such few classes in high school. Another constraint on using a variety of primary sources is that teachers often approach lesson planning by thinking, *How can I best teach this material?* If a certain source lends itself to the material more than another source, teachers will choose to use the first source. For example, advertisements and propaganda lend themselves much more to studying World War II than to studying the Middle Ages. Offensive material contained in some primary sources such as profane language or nudity did not seem to pose a problem to teachers.

### **Case Study**

While observing Mr. R through a required field experience, he used many primary sources. Rather than using a traditional textbook, Mr. R teaches through primary sources. He spends time finding sources that are valuable to the curriculum and that stimulate students. One way that he helps students understand these sources is through small group work. Students have pre-chosen groups of four, and he has them meet with each other to discuss primary sources. Sometimes, he has these groups share their findings with the rest of the class for a short period of time. He also helps students understand various primary sources using his product assignments. Students are required to create a product of their choice (from his list of 30+ products) every couple of weeks. They must use information they have learned during a unit to create these products, and they must demonstrate a theme through their product. Many students choose to write letters or diaries as their products, or write poems and draw

cartoons. By creating these kinds of artifacts themselves, students can better learn to understand them when they come across them as primary sources.

Mr. R also uses a series of segmented reading books in place of a textbook called *A History of US* by Joy Hakim<sup>14</sup>. Each book caters to a specific time period, such as the Gilded Age. Then, the book is divided into twenty or so chapters, each telling a story from that time period. These chapters frequently describe an important event or person from that time, detailing the example's importance. But, rather than simply telling students about a person or event, these books *show* students why and how it is important by incorporating primary sources. Each chapter has at least one primary source that illustrates the significance of that event or person. These chapters are very easy to read since they are written as a story; therefore, students find them more enjoyable to read than a textbook. The books are accompanied by a website that can assist teachers in finding primary resources as well. Mr. R also maintains a webpage where he posts links to many websites with "extra" primary sources for students to view outside of class, should they desire. Some students actually do take advantage of his website and incorporate these extra sources into their products.

Mr. R demonstrates that it is entirely possible for a motivated teacher to design each of his or her lessons around a primary source. All of these results, from both the survey and the case study, illustrate that primary sources are used in classrooms often, but not every type of source is being used frequently, which denies students the opportunity to engage in social studies and critically interpret a source. Also, limiting the types of primary sources one uses denies the interests of many students.

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<sup>14</sup>Joy Hakim, *A History of US: An Age of Extremes 1800-1917* ( United States:Oxford University Press, 2002).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Primary sources are certainly included in most history teachers' lessons, as I anticipated, but it seems that the variety of primary sources frequently used is limited. Many teachers focus on music, pictures, and literature of a time period as primary sources of that period. While these are excellent sources, other primary sources such as journals, speeches, artifacts, and magazine advertisements appear to be rarely utilized by high school teachers, as indicated in the survey and case study results. Perhaps these seldom used sources would engage more students in history.

Every student is an individual with unique interests and skills. Photographs are of course a valuable primary source, but perhaps a student that is fond of literature would be more engaged in a topic if he or she could read something from that time period. This is not to say that photographs and other popular primary sources should not be used, but the other primary sources should be used as well in order to reach more students. Some may argue that time constraints force teachers to cut out many primary sources from their lessons, but why? This makes them seem like a distraction from the topic, but in fact they are the topic. Instead of presenting a PowerPoint lecture about the trenches of World War I, a teacher could find letters and diaries from soldiers to read. Students would be getting the same information, firsthand, and would be able to relate more to the soldiers. They would be interpreting the letters for themselves, and would have to synthesize other information they had learned about World War I to make sense of the letters and diaries. This engages them in the topic while activating their critical thinking skills. In this way, primary sources make history real and relevant to students.



As previously mentioned in the Results section, many teachers choose to use visually-enticing primary sources most often. Students nowadays seem to respond well to visual stimuli, which is likely a result of newer technology and media. Still, being able to see something rather than trying to picture it mentally is easier, and perhaps one reason students seem to like these types of primary sources more. However, it would be a different challenge for students to have to critically analyze a non-visual primary source, and possibly meld it with a visual source to paint a more accurate picture of a time period. Of course photographs and other visual sources speak volumes about a time period, but it is never good to rely on one source to describe a time period or event. This is oftentimes where a secondary source becomes valuable to complement the primary source, but other primary sources could do the same thing, and then students would be interpreting the source themselves. This is not to discount the value of secondary sources when used correctly, but they should not replace primary sources.

The survey also illustrated another key point: all teachers are individuals as well. Every teacher has his or her preference for which primary sources they use. They may be most comfortable using certain sources, or they may believe students respond best to those sources. Although I have made a few generalizations from their answers, the teachers surveyed for this thesis did not always have similar answers. For every question, at least one teacher strayed from the consensus. There is no “best” type of primary source for any group because of individual differences in students and in teachers. Students may learn more from a primary source if it is something their teacher is more comfortable using, such as a photograph versus an artifact. However, that does not mean that teacher should not use artifacts. Students will

benefit from learning through a variety of sources, and that may just mean that the teacher must take a little bit more time preparing that lesson. If students are never exposed to certain kinds of sources, they may be missing out on something they could love studying.

There really is no reason not to use primary sources in history classrooms. Historians learn history through primary sources, and students of history should do the same. Here, the teacher's job is to give them those tools and show them how to use the tools to uncover, interpret, and understand the past. Teachers are placed under many limitations in schools as far as time and resources go. It may be difficult to obtain an artifact for every topic with little money and time. This may be why artifacts are not as frequently used. However, a different primary source that is more easily obtainable could be used for that topic instead.

It is difficult to conclude from this survey and research why many of these primary sources are not used as frequently. Further research may be more indicative of why teachers use the sources they do. To continue this research, a more detailed survey may be beneficial. If teachers had the time to give more qualitative answers, their reasoning may be better understood. However, because of the many time constraints placed on teachers, this type of survey may not produce desirable results either, since qualitative answers take more time to write out. Perhaps if the survey was conducted over a less-busy time period of the year more teachers would be willing to participate. This survey was conducted near the end of the school year in the spring of 2010. During the middle of the semester or year may have been a better option. Another option to increase the number of participants would be to alter the survey so that it would work well as an online survey. An online survey would allow teachers to quickly type their answers, rather than writing them out, which may encourage more to participate.

Another way to obtain more qualitative information on this topic would be to interview different teachers. This would allow for more in-depth questioning and explanations of their teaching methods using primary sources. These interviews could also be accompanied with observation to see students' reactions to different primary sources and teaching methods.

Further research may lead to more conclusive results, but from the results obtained from this research, I have developed several activities using different primary sources, each accompanied by an explanation as to how to incorporate them into a lesson or unit (see Appendix II). These ideas are not new, but it is important that they be studied and discussed to ensure that students are getting the best education available to them. Primary sources are students' way of connecting to the past, and since that is one of the goals of teaching history, they should be given that opportunity at every chance.

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## Appendix I

### Primary Source Survey

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Primary sources are a hot topic in social studies education. This research is a means to better understand the degree to which primary sources are currently used in secondary classrooms, as well as their perceived effectiveness for a variety of students in these classrooms. The results of this survey will be used to suggest ways in which educators can utilize primary sources to make more effective use of valuable class time. This survey poses little risk to you– it is completely anonymous, and the results will only be used for my honors thesis. Results will only be presented at the group level, with no identifying information. Some questions may be uncomfortable to answer; however, you may benefit from this survey by recognizing the frequency of your use of primary sources and how you might better use primary sources in the classroom. Furthermore, the results of this survey may benefit the field of history and social science education. This short survey should not take more than 15 minutes of your time. Participation is completely voluntary. Please return using the stamped and addressed envelope provided with the survey. If you have any questions or comments, you may contact me at [michgob@uni.edu](mailto:michgob@uni.edu) or at 319-429-4905 or Jessica Moon, my advisor, at 319-273-3175. If you have any questions regarding questions about your rights as a participant in this survey, please contact the IRB Office at 319-273-6148. Thank you for your time and contribution.

City \_\_\_\_\_

Grade levels taught \_\_\_\_\_

Courses taught \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you use primary sources as a teaching tool? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. How often do you use primary sources?

More than once a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. How often do you use each of the following primary sources?

	More than once a week	Once a week	Few times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	Rarely	Never
Autobiographies, Diaries, Letters Speeches							
Art							
Music and poems							
Documents							
Political cartoons							
Literature							
Interviews/Oral Histories							
Film							
Photographs							
Maps							
Artifacts							

4. Which 5 of these primary sources are most valuable as a teaching tool? Please rank them 1-5 (1 being most valuable).

Source	Value
Autobiographies, Diaries, Letters Speeches	
Art	
Music and poems	
Documents	
Political cartoons	

Literature	
Interviews/Oral Histories	
Film	
Photographs	
Maps	
Artifacts	

5. In which 5 of the following primary sources does each group of students express most interest. Please rank them 1-5 (1 being most interested).

	9-10 grade male students	11-12 grade male students	9-10 grade female students	11-12 grade female students	English Language Learners
Autobiographies, Diaries, Letters Speeches					
Art					
Music and poems					
Documents					
Political cartoons					
Literature					
Interviews/Oral Histories					
Film					
Photographs					
Maps					
Artifacts					

6. How would you define a primary source?

7. What are three rules that should be followed when using primary sources?



8. What limits do you put on the kinds of primary sources you would use in class?

9. How likely are each of the following issues (sometimes found in primary sources) to cause problems in the classroom? Please rank from 1-5 (1 being most likely).

Nudity \_\_\_\_\_

Drug references \_\_\_\_\_

Foul language \_\_\_\_\_

Offensive racial language \_\_\_\_\_

Violence \_\_\_\_\_

10. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being most likely), how likely are each of the following issues to cause problems with parents?

Nudity \_\_\_\_\_

Drug references \_\_\_\_\_

Foul language \_\_\_\_\_

Offensive racial language \_\_\_\_\_

Violence \_\_\_\_\_

11. From the perspective of a social studies teacher, is there value in using primary sources?

## Appendix II – Primary Source Activities

The following activities are each designed around a different primary source. The assessment for each activity and a description of possible suggestions as to how to incorporate the activity into a lesson follow the primary sources themselves. The first three primary sources are all from the Vietnam Era to demonstrate that a unit can be developed around primary sources, not just an activity or a lesson.

### Primary Source 1 - Speech

#### **President Dwight D. Eisenhower: The Domino Theory, April 7, 1954**

**The President. We will go right to questions this morning, ladies and gentlemen.**

*Q. Mr. President, concerning the hydrogen bomb, are we going to continue to make bigger and bigger H-bombs and, as the H-bomb program continues or progresses, are we learning anything that is directly applicable to the peacetime uses of atomic energy?*

No, we have no intention of going into a program of seeing how big these can be made. I don't know whether the scientists would place any limit; and, therefore, you hear these remarks about "blow-out," which, I think, is even blowing a hole through the entire atmosphere. We know of no military requirement that could lead us into the production of a bigger bomb than has already been produced.

Now, with respect to the potentiality of this development for peace-time use, our people study, I think in almost every aspect of human affairs, how this whole atomic science, this nuclear science, can be applied to peacetime uses. It would be rash to say that the hydrogen bomb doesn't add to the possibilities; yet, at the moment, I know of no direct connection or direct application of the hydrogen bomb principle to peacetime power. I asked that very question of the scientists, and they gave an answer as nearly as I have just stated it as I can recall.

*Q. Mr. President, aren't you afraid that Russia will make bigger hydrogen bombs before we do?*

No, I am not afraid of it. I don't know of any reason for building a bigger bomb than you find to represent as great an efficiency as is needed or desirable, so I don't know what bigger ones would do.

*Q. Mr. President, would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.*

You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things. First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs. Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

Now, with respect to the first one, two of the items from this particular area that the world uses are tin and tungsten. They are very important. There are others, of course, the rubber plantations and so on. Then with respect to more people passing under this domination, Asia, after all, has already lost some 450 million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we simply can't afford greater losses.

But when we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people.

Finally, the geographical position achieved thereby does many things. It turns the so-called island defensive chain of Japan, Formosa, of the Philippines and to the southward; it moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand.

It takes away, in its economic aspects, that region that Japan must have as a trading area or Japan, in turn, will have only one place in the world to go—that is, toward the Communist areas in order to live. So, the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world.

*Q. Mr. President, do you agree with Senator Kennedy that independence must be guaranteed the people of Indochina in order to justify an all-out effort there?*

Well, I don't know, of course, exactly in what way a Senator was talking about this thing. I will say this: for many years, in talking to different countries, different governments, I have tried to insist on this principle: no outside country can come in and be really helpful unless it is doing something that the local people want.

Now, let me call your attention to this independence theory. Senator Lodge, on my instructions, stood up in the United Nations and offered one country independence if they would just simply pass a resolution saying they wanted it, or at least said, "I would work for it." They didn't accept

it. So I can't say that the associated states want independence in the sense that the United States is independent. I do not know what they want.

I do say this: the aspirations of those people must be met, otherwise there is in the long run no final answer to the problem.

*Q. Do you favor bringing this Indochina situation before the United Nations?*

I really can't say. I wouldn't want to comment at too great a length at this moment, but I do believe this: this is the kind of thing that must not be handled by one nation trying to act alone. We must have a concert of opinion, and a concert of readiness to react in whatever way is necessary. Of course, the hope is always that it is peaceful conciliation and accommodation of these problems.

*Q. Mr. President, last week the Senate passed a measure enabling both Hawaii and Alaska to achieve statehood. If the House should pass that measure, would you veto the bill?*

I believe I have made a rule here never to predict what I will do. I am sometimes like the man, you know, who in a speech was introduced a little bit over-generously; and he said, "I am even going to be interested in what I am going to say, because there certainly have been great predictions made about it." [ Laughter ]

Here we have a situation for which I have stood for a long time, Hawaiian statehood. I thought there were certain considerations of national security, and so on, that made the other case a separate one. If these bills are put together, I will have to take a look at them at the time and study and decide what I believe to be right at that moment. I just can't predict.

*Q. Secretary Dulles has said that the Chinese Communists are awfully close to open aggression in Indochina. Can you tell us what action we are prepared to take if their intervention reaches the point of open aggression?*

No, Mr. Clark, I couldn't answer that one for the simple reason that we have got this whole troublous question now under study by a group of people. The only thing I can say is that here is a problem that is of the utmost moment to all of us, not only the United States, to the free world. It is the kind of thing to which there is more attention given, I guess, at the given moment of real acute occurrence than almost any other thing. It is getting study day by day, and I can't tell you what would be the exact reaction.

*Q. Sir, I found many Senators and House members this week who said that while you were allaying their fears, that Secretary Dulles was making them fear more, and I wonder if he is going to clear his statements on Indochina with you?*

So far as I know, Secretary Dulles has never made an important pronouncement without not only conferring and clearing with me, but sitting down and studying practically word by word what he is to say.

Now, I am not aware of any antagonism between the statements he has made and I have made.

I have plead with America to look facts in the face; I have plead with them not to minimize what the possibilities of the situation are, but to realize that we are 160 million of the most productive and the most intelligent people on earth; therefore, why are we going around being too scared?

Now, on the other hand, we would be completely foolish not to see what these facts are and what their potentialities are. I see those two statements a completely compatible, not as incompatible.

*Q. Mr. President, you have touched on this, but I wonder if you could tell us whether there is any truth to these reports in the last couple of days that the United States is asking some of the other free nations to join in a joint declaration warning Communist China against any aggression in Southeast Asia?*

No; in approach, Mr. Arrowsmith, you call attention to the problem and say that this looks like a place where the interests of all of us are involved, and now let us talk this over. You don't propose the answer before you study it, put it that way.

*Q. Mr. President, would you say that the last statement of the Secretary of State of last week about Indochina has improved the chance of reaching a negotiated solution at Geneva of the Indochinese controversy?*

Your question is really, do I think there is a good chance of reaching a negotiated solution? ["That is right."] Well, I wouldn't class the chances as good, no, not one that the free world would consider adequate to the situation.

I must say, let me make clear again, I am certain the United States, as a whole, its Congress and the executive portions of its Government, are ready to move just as far as prudence will allow in seeking any kind of conciliation or negotiated agreement that will ease any of the problems of this troubled world. But one thing: we are not going to overstep the line of prudence in keeping ourselves secure, knowing that the agreements we made have some means of being enforced. We are not simply going to take words. There must be some way of making these things fact and deed.

*Q. Does the executive branch want any action by Congress now about Indochina?*

Not at this moment. I should point out, with all the sincerity I have, there is nothing partisan about this problem. There is nothing, so far as I know, in which the executive branch and the Congress are apart. We not only must confer upon the broadest scale with the leaders of Congress as we proceed toward a decision, we go just as far as they would think it would be necessary in such a conference. If some specific authority or anything else were necessary, it would be asked for after the leaders had already agreed on a bipartisan basis this is what we should do.

I know of nobody that is trying to escape his responsibility in this whole business, because we realize that it is America and the free world we are talking about, and nothing else.

*Q. Mr. President, as the last resort in Indochina, are we prepared to go it alone?*

Again you are bringing up questions that I have explained in a very definite sense several times this morning. I am not saying what we are prepared to do because there is a Congress, and there are a number of our friends all over this world that are vitally engaged. I know what my own convictions on this matter are; but until the thing has been settled and properly worked out with the people who also bear responsibilities, I cannot afford to be airing them everywhere, because it sort of stultifies negotiation which is often necessary.

## Primary Source 1 – Handout

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Using President Eisenhower’s interview, answer the following questions in detail. Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary. Make sure to support your answers using evidence from the interview, or from your prior knowledge about American and World History.

1. Why would people in the US be worried about Russia and the hydrogen bomb at this time?
2. Where is Indochina, and why is its location important for the US?
3. What is the “falling domino” principle, and how does it relate to the US and Indochina?
4. Why was the US concerned with whether Indochina became a communist-controlled area?
5. How can an outside country be helpful to another country? What must happen, and why?
6. During this time period (the Cold War), what would be the risks, and what would be the benefits of adding Alaska and Hawaii as states?
7. President Eisenhower said, “...why are we going around being too scared?” What did he mean by this and how does it relate to the situation in Indochina?
8. In regard to reaching a UN solution regarding the situation in Indochina, Eisenhower said, “Well, I wouldn't class the chances as good, no, not one that the free world would consider adequate to the situation.” Who is he including in the “free world,” and what kinds of solutions do you think they would approve of?
9. Did President Eisenhower answer these questions more militaristically or more politically? How so?

## Primary Source 1 – Background context and suggestions

This interview was given at a press conference on April 7, 1954. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a decorated military general, answered reporters' questions regarding current politics and defense. For purposes of this primary source analysis, some questions and answers have been omitted; however, the overall tone and message of Eisenhower's interview remain intact.

In 1953, the Korean War ended, but with no victory for either side; the Communists of North Korea had held their own against American troops. By the next year, 1954, full-on Communist paranoia had swept the United States. Senator Joseph McCarthy had been leading a "witch hunt" for communists for four years, claiming that an extensive, threatening Communist network was operating right under Americans' noses, infiltrating the United States government and communicating insider information back to the Soviets. McCarthy accused many people of being Communist traitors, even though he was often wrong. By 1954, he came to be seen more as a bully than a wise leader, but the seeds of fear regarding the spread of Communism were planted.

This interview introduces the "Domino Theory" of Communism, meaning that if one area of the world falls to Communism, then other, nearby areas may fall as well. The USSR, North Korea, and China were all under Communist control, and their physical locations relative to each other supported this domino theory. Indochina, specifically Vietnam, was also under the influence of Communists in 1954. During the months surrounding this interview, the French were fighting desperately to keep their control over Vietnam; however, they were unable to do so, and Vietnam was divided temporarily. North Vietnam was controlled by Ho



Chi Minh and the Communist Party. Five years later, the North Vietnamese Communists began supplying the Vietcong in the south with weapons, so that the south could rejoin with the north under Communist control. Since the United States supported South Vietnam, they became involved in this conflict, which escalated into the Vietnam War.

This interview could be used as an introduction to the Vietnam Unit in American History. As the above context describes, this interview was given at a crucial moment in history, when Communism was spreading throughout the world, and Americans were terrified of it. This interview would be a great transition from a unit on the 1950s to one on Vietnam. Students could read the interview and answer the questions using prior knowledge. A small or large group discussion of the interview and questions could follow, eventually tying the interview in with the start of the Vietnam War. Students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade would be ideal for this primary source because they would more able to comprehend Eisenhower's message and reporters' goals. Also, they would be more likely to make connections from the previous unit about the 1950s and the Cold War to the new unit about Vietnam. It would also be wise to include a world map with this interview and handout, so that students can more easily see the physical importance of some of the places mentioned in the interview (Alaska, Hawaii, USSR, Indochina, etc.).

Primary Source 2 – “War” by Edwin Starr

War, huh, yeah  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Uh-huh  
War, huh, yeah  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Say it again, y'all

War, huh, good God  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Listen to me

Ohhh, war, I despise  
Because it means destruction  
Of innocent lives

War means tears  
To thousands of mothers eyes  
When their sons go to fight  
And lose their lives

I said, war, huh  
Good God, y'all  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Say it again

War, whoa, Lord  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Listen to me

War, it ain't nothing  
But a heartbreaker  
War, friend only to the undertaker  
Ooooh, war  
It's an enemy to all mankind  
The point of war blows my mind

War has caused unrest  
Within the younger generation  
Induction then destruction  
Who wants to die  
Aaaaah, war-huh  
Good God y'all  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Say it, say it, say it  
War, huh  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Listen to me

War, huh, yeah  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Uh-huh  
War, huh, yeah  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Say it again y'all  
War, huh, good God  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Listen to me

War, it ain't nothing but a heartbreaker  
War, it's got one friend  
That's the undertaker  
Ooooh, war, has shattered  
Many a young mans dreams  
Made him disabled, bitter and mean  
Life is much to short and precious  
To spend fighting wars these days  
War can't give life  
It can only take it away

Ooooh, war, huh  
Good God y'all

What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Say it again

War, whoa, Lord  
What is it good for  
Absolutely nothing  
Listen to me

War, it ain't nothing but a heartbreaker  
War, friend only to the undertaker  
Peace, love and understanding  
Tell me, is there no place for them today  
They say we must fight to keep our freedom  
But Lord knows there's got to be a better way

Ooooooh, war, huh  
Good God y'all  
What is it good for  
You tell me  
Say it, say it, say it, say it

War, huh  
Good God y'all  
What is it good for  
Stand up and shout it  
Nothin

## Primary Source 2 – Handout

Name \_\_\_\_\_

As you listen to the song, “War” by Edwin Starr, read the lyrics as you listen to the music. Then, reflect on the song and lyrics in relation to what you’ve learned about the Vietnam War, and answer the following questions.

1. Describe and elaborate on one of the central themes of this song.
2. “It's an enemy to all mankind.”  
Why is war an enemy to all mankind? What about the “winners” of the war?
3. “War has caused unrest within the younger generation.”  
What events in the 1960s might this lyric be referring to?
4. “Peace, love and understanding tell me, is there no place for them today  
They say we must fight to keep our freedom but Lord knows there's got to be a better way.”  
Are there any “better ways” to keep freedom than fighting? If so, why weren’t those ways used instead of fighting in Vietnam?
5. Why was this song written, and why did it become such a hit?
6. This song was played frequently on the radio, and many people bought this single/record and played it at home with their friends. What effect would this have on the public, and public opinion about the war?

## Primary Source 2 – Background context and suggestions

This song was recorded by Edwin Starr in 1969. In general, it was a musical call for world peace, but more specifically, it protested the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. By 1969, the Vietnam War had escalated greatly. The draft had been reinstituted; therefore, many young men were involuntarily sent to fight the war. Furthermore, since the war had been carrying on for a few years, some war veterans were returning home, telling their friends and families about their experiences in Vietnam. Also, since the US did not have much international support in Vietnam, it was almost entirely a US effort – making the war's toll on America even greater, something the American public was very aware of.

Perhaps the most significant context for this song is the influence of the media during this time period. During WWI, television did not exist. During WWII, television existed, but was a developing technology and not common in every household. During the Vietnam War, most households had a television, and there was no short supply of coverage of the war. Images of young soldiers fighting and dying, and videos of protests and riots were airing in every home – the Vietnam War was up close and personal with the American public. For the first time, Americans could *really* see the terrors of war, and they did not like it. Seeing these images and videos, and hearing about events such as the My Lai massacre, ignited rage and disapproval in many people. In reaction, they protested and rioted more. This song is one of those reactions of protest to the war. These reactions might not have existed, or may not have been as severe, without this incredible development of technology.

This song would be best used in a classroom of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, so that they may look past the seemingly simple lyrics of this song and understand the importance, deepness, and

relevance of it. The teacher should find a copy of this song, either for purchase on a site like iTunes, or on YouTube for free. When playing this song in class, the teacher should first pass out a copy of the lyrics to each student so they can follow along with the music. Also, the teacher should play the song twice so that students have plenty of time to absorb the meaning and significance of it. This project would be best completed individually, so that each student can think about their own interpretation of the lyrics.

Primary Source 3 – Photograph

Photograph of Kim Phuc fleeing Napalm attack, taken by Nick Ut



### Primary Source 3 – Handout

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Keeping in mind your knowledge about the Vietnam War, examine the photograph and answer the following questions.

1. What is your initial reaction to this photograph?
2. Where do you think this photograph was taken?
3. Is this photograph pleasant? Why or why not? Who might be responsible for that – what makes you think this?
4. What do you think is happening in this photograph?
5. Compare the children in the photograph to the adults – what similarities and differences do you see?
6. Describe the background of the photo – what does it mean?
7. What is the most striking thing about this photograph?
8. Why is the girl in the middle running naked?
9. Write a title and caption for this photograph.
10. What do you think the photographer did after taking this picture?
11. Pick one figure in the photograph – write three questions that you would ask them.
12. If this photograph were part of a video, what might happen next? How would it end?
13. How might this photograph affect Americans who saw it?



### Primary Source 3 – Background context and suggestions

This photograph was taken in the village of Trang Bang, just north of Saigon on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1972. The young girl in the foreground of the photograph is Phan Thi Kim Phuc, a nine-year-old girl who grew up in this village during the Vietnam War. Her village was subject to a South Vietnamese napalm attack, coordinated by an American military advisor. Napalm causes severe burns to those it touches, which is why young Kim is naked in the picture. The children in this photograph have looks of severe agony on their faces because of these severe burns. Kim ended up having third-degree burns over fifty-percent of her body, which made her odds of survival slim. However, she survived and recovered, though not without struggle.

Nick Ut, the photographer who won a Pulitzer Prize for this picture, did not just take advantage of Kim's tragic condition – he took her to a hospital to ensure that she received the care she needed. This photograph perhaps best represents both the terror of war, and the powerful impact of the media. This picture was seen by many Americans, and it illustrated that war is not fought in a vacuum; innocent people like Kim were being killed every day. This added fuel to the fire of those protesting the Vietnam War. It also might have made many Americans feel guilty – especially veterans.

Before using this photograph in a classroom, the teacher may want to alert the principal and parents to the sensitive nature of this photograph. Because of the nudity in this photograph, it should be reserved for students in 11<sup>th</sup> (or 12<sup>th</sup>) grades. At that age, they will be more able to handle things of this sensitive nature with maturity. This photograph would be used well in conjunction with other controversial photos from Vietnam, such as the picture of the Buddhist monk serenely burning himself alive in protest, or the photograph of a man with a

gun pointed to his head. These photographs are striking and will resonate with students, who will remember them for that reason, and what they represent.

#### Primary Source 4 – 9/11 Video

YouTube [video]. “2nd Plane Collides.” 2001. NBC [online]. Available from

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tl\\_04Xoi0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tl_04Xoi0) (accessed 1 May 2010).

#### Primary Source 4 – Handout/Assessment

To assess students’ learning from this video clip, a written reflection or a small group discussion would be best. This video is obviously of a sensitive nature, and students should be given the opportunity to fully understand the significance of the commentary in the video as well as the attack itself. To ensure this, the teacher may play the clip twice for students. A small group discussion would allow students to feel free to share their thoughts and reflections about the video clip with others. In a large group discussion, many students may not get a chance to participate, and for this activity, it is best that all students share some kind of opinion or reaction. Primarily, the assessment of this activity would be teacher observation of student participation.

#### Primary Source 4 - Background context and suggestions

This video clip is from the Today Show on NBC. This clip was filmed after the first plane struck the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, but during the time period in which the second plane struck the towers. This video clip is important because it shows history happening. Students can watch this clip and understand the emotions of those experiencing it. The newscasters, who are generally objective, reserved characters, are obviously in shock and emotional distress, demonstrating the tip of the iceberg of effects of 9/11. Also, this clip conveys the confusion Americans experienced as these events unfolded, illustrated through the shock expressed by those in the clip, as well as the language they use, repeatedly calling the attack an “accident.” Understanding these emotions and the confusion of this event is important for students because it will help them understand the subsequent actions of the government and the media.

This lesson should be reserved for students in grades 11 and 12 because of its sensitive nature. In a current events curriculum, this activity would lend itself to a unit on US-Middle Eastern relations. This video clip partially illustrates the progression of the tension-filled relationship between the United States and the Middle East. When showing this clip and during the subsequent class discussions regarding this clip, the teacher must be sure to maintain cultural respect in the classroom. Also, again because of the sensitivity of the material in this clip, the principal should be notified of plans to show this clip to a class, and perhaps parents should be notified as well, but that would depend on the school and district policies related to this topic.